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ABSTRACT

The message of living simply and wanting less may be the most important message outdoor educators can give their students. The nature of outdoor education provides a combination of factors that create an effective learning environment for the practice of living simply. These factors are: (1) going away from the home or school environment to a setting where actions are more related to basic survival; (2) interacting with a group--creating an entire micro-society for the duration of the trip--which can speed up the processes of personal relationships because of close living and interdependence; and (3) living close to nature, which provides the opportunity to learn about basic needs and the essentials of a quality life. To use the potential of this learning environment to the fullest, whatever time is available should contribute to the main message. Expectations can be discussed during planning sessions, the bus trip can be used to teach how to share a small space equitably with comfort for all, setting up camp can be used to teach minimal impact and balance between group versus personal space needs, and structured discussion during the bush experience itself helps participants put into perspective their role as inhabitants of Earth. Outdoor educators should model their own behavior to show participants how to integrate the message into their lives. (TD)

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Everything is program: Maximising the Message
- Gale Orford
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If I have very little because that is what I have chosen to have, I am rich: for I have everything I want.

(Vittachi 1992, p. 28),

Education for What?
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Global survival will depend upon us wanting less; and the challenge we face is to convince people that 'living simply is not the same as living meanly: it may be more about having enough, though no more than enough, of what we really, deeply want' (Vittachi 1992, p.28). The message of living simply and wanting less may be the most important message we, as outdoor educators, should concentrate on for our students, beginning with young children and reinforcing as frequently as possible throughout the school years, the importance of the choice of quality versus quantity. Where and how do we begin to get this message across, and how can we help people choose to live by it? I am proposing in this paper that a contribution outdoor education can make to the world community is to begin to teach people about living more simply, or as a presenter at the recent Earth Summit in Rio put it, to live with 'sophisticated modesty' (Maurice Strong in Vittachi 1992,p. 28).

The Medium of Outdoor Education
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Ideally, in outdoor education programs we create optimal settings for

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achieving a specific educational purpose; and with a clear vision of the goal and careful planning, we work toward accomplishing it. The very nature of outdoor education provides a rare combination of factors that create an effective learning environment where children and adults can practise living simply. The main factors which interact to create the power of the outdoor setting as a unique learning environment are:

1) going away from the home and/or school environment';

2) participating in activities with a group of peers and outdoor education - qualified adults; and

3) living in a more natural environment, closer to nature.

First of all, the outdoor education camp or trip, whether it be to wilderness or to a well used residential camp, takes participants away: away from home and the comfortable, relatively predictable rhythm of daily life; away from the complexities and dependencies of modern day lifestyles. (See, for example, the theory of how camp works, as explained in I Am Somebody: The Messages and Methods of Organised Camping for Youth Development (Chenery 1991). 'Away' could also mean removed from a multitude of distractions that seem important in our normal lifestyle, including our conditioning to be clockwatchers. We move to a setting where there is time to reflect and pay attention to detail, where the things we do are more related to basic survival or subsistence needs and, therefore, are more relevant or more real, and definitely more closely connected to outcomes. There may be no more immediate learning experience than draining the last drop from your water bottle with the spring still two thirsty kilometres away --your present discomfort resulting from your decision not to fill an extra water bottle because you didn't want to carry the weight. This consequence could possibly be a small step towards consideration of the importance of the availability of drinking water and might be translated into a recognition of how we take tap water for granted.

Secondly, the nature of the camp or trip group in outdoor education programs is a major contributing factor to the learning potential of the experience. Living away from home with a group of peers and adults who are the entire micro-society for the student for a short while can make it possible to make a fresh start: for the young person to act differently, respond differently to hard situations, or find a satisfying role within the group. The power of a peer group can be maximised to achieve group goals if the importance of those goals is recognised by all participants. Also, what better place is there than an extended trip for a young person to experiment with ways to be a leader,

a follower, a group member, a unique individual, a dependent, an 'independent', and at the same time experience the satisfaction of efficacy and take the risks of personal vulnerability? This is not intended to suggest that when a group goes on a trip some magic happens, and everyone gets along and automatically works cooperatively to the same end. In fact, peer groups can have some of the hardest struggles to get along together as each individual tries out roles within the group, looking for a personal niche. However, the intensity of the trip or camp group speeds up the processes of personal relationships because of the closer living and obvious interdependence, and because it's not possible to escape to Mum and Dad at the end of the day.

Thirdly, the component of the natural, or near natural, setting is essential to the outdoor education experience. Even though basic skills and background information are often presented in less than 'near natural' places (classrooms, school ovals, etc.) we would agree that these are only part of the preparation for going bush. Whether this 'bush' is pristine wilderness or, at the other extreme, a managed campsite with tennis courts and mowed lawns, it is outdoors, with access to trees, insects, animals, creeks, beaches, dams, lakes, rivers, rocks , hills, mountains and valleys with exposure to wind, rain, sun, snow, thunderstorms, sunrises and sunsets. All of these are potential teachers of the things we need to learn about basic needs in order to make informed choices about the essentials of a quality life. While out in the bush, opportunities can be created for participants to consider important questions and values as they experience a different way to interact with the world and its natural elements.

Even though we might reach agreement that living away from home with a group of peers and adults in a natural area are key components of outdoor education, we know they don't ensure that outdoor education occurs. Now we add the reason for doing it and develop a clear purpose that takes advantage of the optimal conditions and the learning climate that can lie latent in that setting. Having moved the group to a new learning environment, we must now integrate content and use the potential of this powerful learning environment to the fullest. Making the most of the learning opportunities provided can be done by understanding that everything during the outdoor education experience is program. This includes pre-planning, the bus trip, arrival, setting up, outdoor activities, community living (meals, free time, bed time, cooking, dishes, etc.), evening programs, packing up, the trip home, and follow up afterwards. Whatever time is available should contribute to the purpose or main objective. If our main message for a camp is that it's possible to live more simply and to make choices about how you want to live, let's look at some ways to maximise the delivery of this

message.

Being 'away' (leaving home behind) can begin with program planning sessions where the anticipation of the trip and the excitement about 'getting away from it all' can be built up. Participants and teachers can talk about their expectations and some personal achievement goals, and teachers can present information about opportunities to try new things that may occur on the trip.

These can be reinforced on the bus trip, which is not only the vehicle for getting away but can also be the start of the intensified learning process. Excellent teachable moments arise during bus travel: how to give everyone a turn in the 'good' seats; how to share a small space equitably with reasonable comfort for all; what is safe on a bus, including the responsibility for self and concern for others; and consideration of and respect for the personal space of other travellers. Children spend so much time in cars, school buses, and on public transport that many have become 'immune' to travel - they buckle up after some argument about seats, play their hand-held Game Boy, then the car stops and they climb out with little or no knowledge of what happened between home and the destination - the distance travelled, the route taken, the amount of fuel used, and what it cost, etc. The highlight of the trip was most likely to have been the stop at McDonald's.

The arrival at the destination is probably the main stage setter for what is to come. This is the point where people and gear management efficiency can often take over to the extent that learning goals get pushed into the background, the lost sleeping bag evokes a brusque remark about where it 'should have been', and the really quiet child who is very nervous about the whole thing, and wouldn't dare ask where you go to the toilet, gets easily overlooked because of the excitement and rough play of some of the others. This is a prime opportunity for adults to model ecologically sound decision making, emphasise inclusivity, and begin the process of helping students practise these principles: guiding the selection of tent sites for safety, minimal impact, and balance between group versus personal space needs; managing any conflict that occurs as decisions are made; and monitoring the contributions that individuals are making to getting camp set up and running.

An extended base camp, a walk, rock climbing, a ski tour, a paddle, or even just a week off from school are all excellent motivators to encourage students into the bush. The outdoor activity part of any trip or camp is the means we use to draw people to the natural world, giving them basic skills and support so they can travel in the bush safely.

Moving through the bush is a beginning step, and as we learn more about it and experience it, the bush can begin to move in us. We will be awed by it, puzzled by it, stretched by it, calmed by it, sometimes afraid of it; and we may grow to love it. We can begin to put into perspective our role as inhabitants of Earth, and hopefully translate that into positive action for the bush. These connections aren't automatically made and sometimes never progress beyond the experience of the activity for some participants. Often it takes structured discussion, observation, and reflection for students to stop long enough to consider something beyond their immediate experience. It will most certainly take trip leaders being seen to place value on student comments and observations, taking time to reflect, stopping to speculate on how some natural incident might have occurred, and openly expressing feelings about their experience.

Rest stops are perfect times for challenging a group to think about an issue, talk about an incident that occurred earlier, or have a one on one talk with a student. Meal preparation and eating time is also productive time for reflection about doing things differently. As we cook a simple meal, keeping in mind that this is all that is planned for dinner, we are careful not to waste any, and we make sure each person has a fair share. When we have eaten, there are often times when we would have liked more, but we also know that we have eaten enough.

If everything is program, then every interaction between a child and adult is an opportunity to teach, and every action an opportunity to model the message. When a trip leader takes care in responding to a question or situation, then the message we are giving is that caring is something we value, and we are showing how to practise it. As teachers and leaders, our personal gear gives participants a message about what is enough to be comfortable in the bush; and how we care for our gear shows how dispensable we believe it to be. Careless use and handling of gear reinforces the insurance syndrome many children suffer from - the idea that you can always get another one!

Can you remember being disappointed at the end of a fantastic trip, when you feel you have really made some progress with a group, and all they can think about is getting on the bus, often leaving you to finish packing the gear? How might this happen differently? Maybe your efforts at equitable seating arrangements will eliminate the rush for the bus, but maybe they won't. What about talking ahead of time about how things might be done, to give students an opportunity to think about how they might contribute? We might start some discussions ahead of time such as 'When we arrive at the car park, there are some things we need to do...'; or, 'We'll be at camp in about half an hour. Remember how long

it took us last night to get the tents up and start cooking dinner. Can you suggest some ways we could do this differently?'

Bus trips home can be pretty low key, with everybody tired and several wanting to sleep, and the anticipation of the comforts associated with 'civilisation' can dominate the discussion. Are there ways to make this more productive and channel it into another learning opportunity? Maybe we can use this opportunity to laugh at ourselves a bit and our so-called 'essentials' of life, and acknowledge that even though we had a good trip and proved we can manage very simply, we're not there yet in our daily lives. Maybe this a time for setting some small, personal, manageable goals to do with consuming less: recycling, riding the bike more rather than expecting Mum to drive you; looking after what you have so it lasts longer; or, maybe, starting an organic vegie garden! Once back at school it is possible to follow up on the ideas students had about how they might do things a little differently, and to talk about how hard it can be when you were the only one in your family who went on that walk and your family might not understand what you're trying to do. Nor may you have your friends from the trip around you to encourage you or do it with you.

Outdoor education can make a difference in how people perceive a part of the world and their place in it, and it can provide a different perspective on how we usually live compared to what might be possible. If these things are important, and working toward 'sophisticated modesty' is a worthy goal, then we must not waste learning opportunities in our programs. As outdoor educators, it is absolutely imperative that we are clear about our purpose, that we work to create a learning environment that constantly reminds participants about this message; and that we do our best to model behaviour that shows we are trying to integrate it into our lives.

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